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Daily Information Session — 14.236 MHz @ 23:30z

Paradise Island Phu Quoc—XV4D ***By Andy Paulick, DL5CW***

“How does it look this year? Are you joining us?” After my first DXpedition with Sigi’s Team, DL7DF to Botswana last year, this was not an unexpected question. “Where are we going this year?”

“Vietnam” was his answer. That was perfect—my premiere for me to enter Asia. So I didn’t hesitate to say I would join them. The approved team this time consisted of Frank (DL7UFR), Andy (DL5CW), Wolfgang (DL4WK), Sigi (DL7DF), and Manfred (DK1BT), pictured below, left to right.

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Our journey was supposed to start on November 2nd to the Vietnamese island Phu Quoc, IOTA AS-128, southwest in the country. Planned was an overnight stay in Saigon (Ho-Chi-Minh-City) to pick up our license.

However, before we could start our journey we had to take care of the inevitable formalities. First of all we applied for a visa for the “Socialist Republic of Vietnam”. In addition, each of us needed a “Harmonized Amateur Radio Examination Certificate” (HAREC), an English written formulary with stamp and signature of the Ger-

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inside... *Thumbs up or thumbs down on altering the newsletter format?*

Paradise Island Phu Quoc—XV4D (con'd)

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man Federal Network Agency.

With this small barrier behind us, the bigger barriers loomed. We planned to take the aircraft from Berlin via Doha in the Emirates of Qatar to Saigon. There we wanted to change to a small aircraft to Phu Quoc. To Doha we planned to travel by "Qatar Airways" but they were really strict with their baggage allowance—exactly 20kg per person and the carry on luggage could not exceed 7kg. In a small DXpedition group of 5 people, this means 100kg for equipment and clothing and a very small carry on luggage allowance. There was no way to get the really nice service personal of Qatar airways to alter their policies. Every additional kilogram was very is pricey at 31 Euro per kilogram. This caused our cash-budget to swell, and we still didn't know how the "Vietnamese Airline" would react concerning our baggage weight. We set out to optimize our luggage: "Everything for the technic, but nothing for the operator!" was our new directive. After all, we needed everything for 160m to 10m, to cover all bands and modes, and we wanted to have three complete stations and amplifiers available. Our final weight was some kilograms heavier. Included was an 18m and a 15m tower for low band verticals, a Spiderbeam for 20 to 10m, lots of wire and a Butter-nut HF-9V as an all around antenna. We had our inevitable K2-transceivers from Elecraft, and an IC-7000 from ICOM for the digimodes. We topped that off with some netbooks with WinTest, filters, and a bunch of coaxial cables.

The 2nd of November arrived and we started from Berlin-Tegel. Our luggage was checked through to Phu-Quoc, according the information we got.

We had a relaxed night flight via Doha to Saigon, lasting sixteen hours. After sixteen hours, we were really surprised looking in the baggage claim area. Our luggage was not checked through to Phu Quoc. Therefore, we had to take care of it and leave it for one night at the airport. We crossed our fingers, hoping there would not be any problems the next morning. Frank and Sigi took care of organizing the licenses and the rest of the team went by taxi to the hotel in the city. My travel guide prepared a lot of written pages explaining how to cross streets—now I know why. In Saigon the streets are crowded with motor bikes, and nobody obeys any traffic lights or traffic rules. There are some rules for surviving: walk

slowly, never ever turn back and do what the locals do!



The sheer quantity of motorbikes made crossing a street a hazardous undertaking.

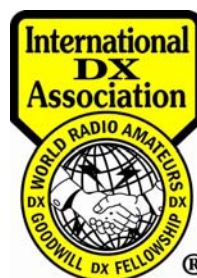
Two hours later, Frank and Sigi were back, showing the certificate of our license, XV4D. Next morning our journey continued and we were surprised nobody paid attention to our luggage weight restriction. We arrived at the small island airport, outside temperature 34°C and almost 100% humidity. The person awaiting us from the "Sea Star Resort"—Mr. Wunderbar—greeted us. We named him after the only German word he knew and used often for the next two weeks "Wunderbar" (wonderful)—meaning awesome.

Within two days we were QRV on all bands. We focused on the low bands. The demand on 160m

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Paradise Island Phu Quoc—XV4D (con'd)



Sigi, DL7DF, and Nguyen Bac Ai finish up the licensing process in Saigon. Now we were “good to go!”

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and 80m was exceptionally high, therefore we tried to optimize those antennas. Afterwards we got usable signals acknowledged. For the higher bands we got only the Spiderbeam to operate. Whenever another band was open, we used a wire beam ad-



The Spiderbeam came together with minimal difficulty after a check of the instructions!

justed for Europe for 17m and the HF9V as a universal antenna.

The conditions were as expected on all bands—bad. On bands above 20m we had only short openings. The signals were really weak, so we were limited to CW. For SSB the signals didn't suffice. Therefore, we couldn't fulfill the expectations of ourselves or our “public”. However, even here the “cluster mentality”

appeared. We called for minutes on a most likely dead band, until suddenly we reached the pile up after a cluster spot. Fortunately, our shack had a more or less stable internet, and therefore a stable DX cluster connection via wireless LAN. We even could upload data to our log on our homepage.



We believe the signals were poor due to the solar cycle, but somewhere in this “nest” of wires there surely must have been at least one noise source.

We consequently tried to use every short opening to North America, but we couldn't satisfy everybody's wish for a QSO.

For most of the days the bands opened the earliest in the afternoon, so that we arranged some trips in the closer surrounding areas before the openings appeared.

Phu Quoc is the biggest Island of Vietnam and is situated in the gulf of Thailand, 40 kilometers in front of the southwest coast. In only 12 km distance you can find the mainland of Cambodia and even only 4 km away lies the Island Kaoh Ses belonging to Cambodia. The highest elevations lie in the north and south of the island and reach 600 meters of with rainforest covered terrain. The island has 70,000 inhabitants, is 48km long and between 3 and 28km wide. Most of the residents live in the capital of the island, Duon Duong. There is a small airport, some asphalted streets and some more dusty paths, some banks, a hospital, a post-office, a police station and a

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Paradise Island Phu Quoc—XV4D (con'd)

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small lovely market.

The inner island of Phu Quoc harbored palmtree covered beaches, crystal clear water and an almost deserted jungle. The west coast was the perfect place to spot the sunset over the sea, a real rarity within Vietnam.

During our DXpedition we always had a tropical climate with day and night long high temperatures around 30°C (86°F). Even in the night we found our glasses foggy due to the high humidity on Phu Quoc. What else can we do than use some brewed water to balance our fluid loss. The inexpensive, native, icecold, “Saigon” beer fitted perfectly.



“When in Phu Quoc, do as the natives do!”

The native people were friendly and open-minded. We always felt safe and enjoyed our trips in the closer surrounding area. The best way to move around was to rent a motorbike at the hotel for only 100,000 Dong (3,75 EURO) for the whole day. We spent a morning at the south and the north tip of the island, visited a pepper plantation, a bead-farm and some waterfalls in the middle of the rainforest. Always present were different smells—brackwater in the small sleepy harbors, fishy on places where billions of small fishes were dried in the sun, palm oil-aromatic and chicken when you pass by cook shops. Most interesting was the market in Duong Duong. Here we experienced how lively a small village like this can be. Everybody who is able to walk, is visiting this place once a day for shopping. Vegetables,



Also, when in Phu Quoc, watch how the natives do it before you try it! Below, we could always tell when we were nearing a fish drying area.



chicken, spices, meat and fish—everything is in copious amounts. For Western Europeans the meat and fish market was a real adventure. Some of the foodstuffs for sale to meet the needs of Vietnamese cuisine were, let's say, unusual. Here I could count, for example, frogs and toads alive or nicely gutted and skinned. Luckily we never had to deal with this in our

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The Market

Paradise Island Phu Quoc—XV4D (con'd)



Frog legs for lunch, anyone?

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hotel cuisine.

After two weeks of amateur radio our DXpedition ended. JN3TRK was the last in our log. Disassembly and the flight back to Berlin on November 17th were long, but uneventful. Our QSL cards are already printed and on their way to their recipients when this article is in press. You can find some more details and photos of our expedition on our homepage www.dl7df.com.

After this DXpedition to Asia, I still have a dream: Participate with an amateur radio team to Oceania. Hopefully this will happen one day.

Andy, DL5CW

(Andy is about to realize his dream, and will be a member of the Kermadec DXpedition in November/December of this year. www.kermadec.de —The Editor)



We hope you were in our log.

What do you think?

Notice something different about this issue, other than it being a special issue? We've changed Page One to show our officers and directors and give a more prominent display of the INDEXA logo.

No, we're not trying to do a makeover like some magazines do every couple of years. Some like things to be just as they are. Tell us how you like things, if you would.

—John Scott, K8YC, Editor
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